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ON PAGE A1-2

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Spy plane flew over Cuba Friday, Washington says

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Washington—The United States flew a high-altitude supersonic SR-71 spy plane over the Havana area Friday in keeping with President Carter's orders to increase surveillance of Soviet troops in Cuba, administration officials reported yesterday.

It was the first SR-71 flight over Cuba since last November, when a single mission collected data on newly-arrived MIG-23 jet fighters. Otherwise, Mr. Carter has stopped Cuban overflights since the beginning of his presidency as a goodwill gesture.

Whether the spy plane missions will be repeated, officials said, will depend on intelligence requirements.

The SR-71 is capable of operating at altitudes of about 20 miles and making precise photographs of objects on the ground. It is the most sophisticated spy plane in the U.S. forces, and its mission over Cuba Friday obviously was seen as a necessary supplement to intelligence-gathering done by earth satellites and by other types of aircraft operating off the Cuban coasts.

Officials said that units of the Soviet brigade in Cuba were based south and west of Havana.

Disclosure of the Friday flight evidently was volunteered here because it was suspected that Cuba's President Fidel Castro would reveal it in any case. This suggested that the United States had indications that Cuban radar detected the high-flying airplane as it crossed over.

The Russian brigade was described Friday by Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of Central Intelligence, as consisting of three infantry battalions, a tank battalion and all the normal artillery, antiaircraft and antitank guns of such a formation.

In his speech to the nation Monday night, President Carter listed Soviet "assurances" about the non-threatening nature of the brigade. But the President said the United States would not "rest on these Soviet statements alone."

He said America would "monitor the status of the Soviet forces by increased surveillance of Cuba." The country would also make sure that no Soviet unit in Cuba could threaten U.S. security or that of any other nation in the western hemisphere.

Part of that insurance was to plan increased maneuvers in the Caribbean area and to establish a Caribbean Joint Task Force, headquartered at Key West, Fla., and responsible for planning and conducting exercises as well as meeting contingencies.

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